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Brett Poles, front, 17, of Baltimore, hits the ball while Obed Roman Garcia, 16, of Pikesville, watches as the high school members of SquashWise practice at Meadow Mill Athletic Club in Woodberry on Friday. **KARL MERTON FERRON/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTOS**

# SQUASHWISE MOVE GETS COMPLICATED

Closing of Meadow Mill accelerates nonprofit's plans to convert bus terminal

By Lorraine Mirabella

SquashWise, a nonprofit that helps Baltimore students boost academics and career readiness through the racket sport of squash, had just finalized plans to carve out a future home in the city's former Greyhound bus terminal when it hit an unexpected snag.

The organization, based at Meadow Mill Athletic Club in Woodberry, had looked for years for space to accommodate its growth from just 14 students in 2007 to more than 100.

The program purchased the long-closed bus terminal in Mount Vernon and plans to convert it into a squash and community center in the next two years. Soon after, program directors learned they would lose their current squash courts next month.

Meadow Mill club owner Nancy Cushman said Thursday the gym and squash facility in a converted mill in the Jones Falls Valley plans to close July 31 after being unable to recover from a three-month closure and drops in membership during the pandemic.

Abby Markoe, a co-founder and executive director of SquashWise, credited the nearly 30-year-old fitness club, known for its squash courts, with offering the space



Safety goggles belonging to Abby Markoe, executive director of SquashWise, rest on bleachers while Poles and Roman Garcia practice on the court.

and support for SquashWise to grow.

"I always think of it as a gym with a heart," Markoe said Friday. "It's such an inclusive community, and we always felt welcome. ... We're going to have a couple of years where we'll have to be a traveling roadshow."

The city's only public school squash

program seeks to expand access to what is known in the U.S. as an exclusive and predominantly white sport played in country clubs, elite colleges and private schools, Markoe said.

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## Data: Black drivers arrested at higher rates

More than half of traffic stops in Baltimore County were of African Americans

By Taylor DeVille

More than half of all drivers pulled over, searched, cited and arrested last year by Baltimore County police were Black, despite efforts to examine racial disparities in traffic stops in a county where Black residents make up less than a third of the population.

Police pulled over vehicles 31,000 times last year during the coronavirus pandemic — a substantial decrease from nearly 83,000 traffic stops in 2019. Black people represent 30% of Baltimore County's population, according to census estimates, but were involved in 58% of all vehicle stops in 2020.

White drivers, who make up about 60% of the county's population, accounted for just over 31% of traffic stops last year, according to the most recent update to the county's traffic stop data dashboard, recently presented to the county's Equitable Policing Advisory Group. Hispanic drivers account for 6% of the county population and constituted 5% of traffic stops.

The racial disparity in traffic stops persisted last year despite the formation of the work group by Democratic County Executive Johnny Olszewski Jr. to assess police traffic stop practices and issue recommendations.

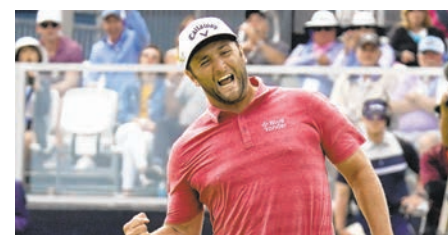
In a statement, Olszewski said he hoped the data would "inform the ongoing work" of the advisory group to "support sustained progress on this important issue."

The group, whose focus has now expanded to all issues of policing equity, was launched in late 2019 after the prior year's data showed 57% of Baltimore County traffic stops involved Black drivers. In 2019, Black motorists were 55% of all stops, according to county data.

The Olszewski administration stopped short of answering what to make of the widened racial disparity in traffic stops since then.

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### INSIDE



## Rahm birdies last 2 holes to win US Open

Jon Rahm, 26, of Spain, makes a bending 25-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole to catch Louis Oosthuizen, then sinks a curling birdie putt from 18 feet on the final hole for a 4-under-par 67 and a one-shot victory in the major at Torrey Pines in San Diego on Sunday. **SEE SPORTS PAGE 1**



Brett Poles, left, 17, of Baltimore, and Obed Roman Garcia, 16, of Pikesville, chat while breaking from practice as high school members of SquashWise at Meadow Mill Athletic Club in Woodberry. **KARL MERTON FERRON/BALTIMORE SUN**

## SquashWise

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“It’s a sport you can pick up anytime and play your whole life and build relationships through,” Markoe said.

City middle schoolers and high schoolers in the program get coaching and a chance to compete along with academic tutoring, mentoring and counseling in college and career preparation.

Each year, more than 90% of the program’s rising ninth graders are accepted to selective-entry high schools and more than 80% go on to college.

SquashWise partners with KIPP-Ujima, a Title I charter school in West Baltimore, and with the Squash and Education Alliance, a network of more than 20 similar programs in cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago and Detroit.

In the new facility, on the campus of the Maryland Center for History and Culture, the program expects to nearly double the number of student participants. The program acquired the former terminal at Howard and Centre streets from the Maryland Center on May 11 for \$2 million.

The historic building served as a bus terminal from 1941 until 1987. Maryland Center, formerly known as the Maryland Historical Society, acquired it in 1999 and in 2016 decided to offer the unused real estate for redevelopment.

SquashWise directors envision trans-

forming the old terminal into six squash courts, a multipurpose fitness space, classrooms and a rec room, for after-school tutoring, sports programs, local matches and regional tournaments.

It’s designed to serve as a community center that expands the reach of squash beyond traditional settings. It will work with Maryland Center for History on programs as well.

SquashWise’s move to the Market Center Historic District is expected to add to revitalization efforts along the Howard Street corridor and bring new life to the historic terminal, said Katie Caljean, Maryland Center for History’s vice president of education and strategic engagement, in an announcement.

Meadow Mill Athletic Club’s closure adds new urgency to a soon-to-be-launched fundraising campaign to build out the new SquashWise home, Markoe said. The nonprofit had estimated an already ambitious two-year period for fundraising and renovations, but now hopes to fast-track those efforts. It has not yet announced a fundraising goal. In the interim, the program is lining up other area courts.

Some of the older SquashWise students are especially anxious to see the new facility become a reality — before they graduate from high school.

On Friday, Brett Poles, 17, of Park Heights, and Obed Roman Garcia, 16, a rising junior at Pikesville High School, met up for a few games at Meadow Mill.

Rackets in hand, they circled each other on the four-walled court to hit the ball.

Poles, a rising senior at St. Paul’s School for Boys who hopes to play squash in college, joined the program in fifth grade.

“I wanted to try something new,” Poles said. “I had never heard of squash before.”

Students said the program has helped them improve academics and become more motivated. They’ve been able to meet people while traveling out of state for tournaments and attend summer camps they’re referred to through the program.

“At first I wasn’t as strong with my academics. I wasn’t as focused,” said Roman Garcia, who joined in seventh grade and now plays almost daily. “Squash has helped me focus more on academics.”

Abisola Abina, a 16-year-old rising junior at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, said she was first drawn to the program as a “resume builder.”

“When I tried out and I made the team, I realized I actually wanted to join because it was fun,” Abina said. “I like the competition ... and you focus on yourself and your strengths and weaknesses.”

Savoy Adams, a sophomore at Loyola University of Maryland who joined as a seventh grader and helps lead an alumni network, said his two younger brothers have followed him into the program.

For its future home, he said he envisions “a place of our own that is contributing to generational change for the future of the city.”